



TiVo your TV Program and Visit City Hall

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, March 10, 2008

This past Wednesday night I hosted a community budget meeting for my district. Between City Hall and my meeting I stopped at home to pick up my laptop. As I left, I saw my neighbors out in front of their homes. My next door neighbor was tossing a ball with his son. Other neighbors were working on a car, fiddling with sprinklers and carrying groceries into their home. I thought to myself: no one is going to show up for this meeting.

To my relief, approximately 25 people attended from eight different neighborhoods. However, with over 1,000 people showing up twice for the "Little Saigon" issue, I was hoping for more than 25 for a budget meeting.

I prepared a budget presentation that included where city funding comes from and how it is allocated. I presented specific examples like a downtown surface parking lot from which the city received \$1,170 each year via property tax—in 1985. The RDA invested in this property and brought in the Fairmont hotel. Today the city/RDA receives \$460,000 each year via property tax on the same piece of land plus TOT tax from the hotel rooms. This is an important point since specific examples show the importance RDA has played in San Jose. Other topics included spending choices made on the council, breaking out what percentage of certain taxes go to San Jose, as well ideas discussed at weekend meetings hosted by the labor unions, which I attended.

Attendees of my meeting shared that the city should do a better job maximizing rents and/or liquidating city property, selling the old city hall, and the possibility of implementing 401K's for new city employees. However, no one wanted service cuts or to raise taxes, but layoffs and shutting down facilities were put forth as possibilities. We know that layoffs would be tough on employees' families and service cuts would be tough on the residents as well.

An idea that I raised was: why not ask if city employees could take one day off a year without pay? If every city employee took a day off

without pay, we would save \$3 million. \$15 million would be saved if they took a week without pay. When City Hall shuts down in December for two weeks, everyone gets paid for those days not worked. Perhaps the city should consider meeting and conferring with the unions to see if we could remove just one of those days so the city could save money. I bring this up because it includes ALL employees—management, council, etc., not just a few.

A few people expressed that they are afraid of special interests groups taking over the budget process, including business and labor. Others felt that city council meetings are a challenge since they are often held during the day when they work and that waiting 3-4 hours to speak for 2 minutes is painful. (Knitting and reading a book while waiting to speak were also suggested.) I have asked that the Mayor's Budget Message on March 18 be heard in the evening so residents have an opportunity to comment.

I hope my neighbors can break away from family and TV for just one night to give feedback to the council on the priorities of San Jose taxpayers.

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